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## Bogus Reasons For War On Iraq

By **Michael T. Klare**, [AlterNet](#)

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In his State of the Union Address and other speeches, President Bush has attempted to articulate the reasons for going to war with Iraq and ousting Saddam Hussein. Stripped of rhetoric, these can be boiled down to three main objectives: (1) to eliminate Saddam's weapons of mass destruction (WMD); (2) to diminish the threat of international terrorism; and (3) to promote democracy in Iraq and surrounding areas.

To determine if these powerful motives are actually behind the rush to war, each must be examined in turn.

### 10 Eliminating WMD

The reason most often given by President Bush for going to war with Iraq is to reduce the risk of a WMD attack on the United States. Such an attack would be devastating, and vigorous action is appropriate to prevent it.

If the threat of WMD attack is, in fact, Bush's primary concern, then he would surely pay the greatest attention to the greatest threat of WMD usage against the United States, and deploy available U.S. resources – troops, dollars and diplomacy – accordingly. But this is not what the president is doing.

North Korea and Pakistan pose greater WMD threats to the United States than Iraq for several reasons. Each possesses a much bigger WMD arsenal. Pakistan has several dozen nuclear warheads along with missiles and planes capable of delivering them hundreds of miles away; it is also suspected of having chemical weapons. North Korea is thought to possess sufficient plutonium to produce one to two nuclear devices along with the capacity to manufacture several more; it also has a large chemical weapons stockpile and a formidable array of ballistic missiles.

Iraq, by contrast, possesses no nuclear weapons today and is thought to be several years away from producing any, even under the best of circumstances.

A policy aimed at protecting the United States from WMD attacks would identify Pakistan and North Korea as the leading perils, and put Iraq in a

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rather distant third place.

## 2) Combating Terrorism

The administration has argued at great length that a U.S. invasion and "regime change" in Iraq would mark the greatest success in the war against terrorism so far. Why this is so has never been made entirely clear. It is said that Saddam's hostility toward the United States somehow sustains and invigorates the terrorist threat to America. Saddam's elimination would thus greatly weaken international terrorism and its capacity to attack the United States.

There simply is no evidence that this is the case. If anything, the opposite is true. From what we know of al Qaeda and other such organizations, the objective of Islamic extremists is to overthrow any government in the Islamic world that does not adhere to a fundamentalist version of Islam. The Baathist regime in Iraq does not qualify; thus, under al Qaeda doctrine, it must be swept away, along with the equally deficient governments in Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

It follows that a U.S. effort to oust Saddam Hussein and replace his regime with another secular government – this one kept in place by American military power – will not diminish the wrath of Islamic extremists, but rather fuel it.

## 3) The Promotion of Democracy

The ouster of Saddam Hussein, the administration claims, will allow the Iraqi people to establish a truly democratic government and serve as a beacon and inspiration for the spread of democracy throughout the Islamic world.

But there is little reason to believe that the administration is motivated by a desire to spread democracy in its rush to war with Iraq.

First of all, many of the top leaders of the current administration, particularly Donald Rumsfeld and Dick Cheney, happily embraced Hussein's dictatorship in the 1980s when Iraq was the enemy of our enemy (Iran), and thus considered our de facto friend. Under the so-called "tilt" toward Iraq, the Reagan-Bush administration decided to assist Iraq in its war against Iran during the Iran-Iraq War of 1980-88.

Under Reagan, Iraq was removed from the list of countries that support terrorism, thus permitting the provision of billions of dollars' worth of agricultural credits and other forms of assistance to Hussein. The bearer of this good news was none other than Rumsfeld, who traveled to Baghdad and met with Hussein in December 1983 as a special representative of President Reagan.

The Department of Defense, then headed by Dick Cheney, provided Iraq with secret satellite data on Iranian military positions. This information was provided to Saddam even though U.S. leaders were informed by a senior State Department official on Nov. 1, 1983 that the Iraqis were using

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chemical weapons against the Iranians "almost daily," and could use U.S. satellite data to pinpoint chemical weapons attacks on Iranian positions.

Not once did Rumsfeld and Cheney speak out against Iraqi use of these weapons or suggest that the United States discontinue its support of the Hussein dictatorship during this period. There is no reason whatsoever to believe that our current leadership has a principled objection to dictatorial rule in Iraq.

Further, the United States has developed close ties with the post-Soviet dictatorships in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan – all ruled by Stalinist dictators who once served the Soviet empire. And there certainly is nothing even remotely democratic about Kuwait or Saudi Arabia, two of America's other close allies in the region.

Other motives must be at work. Control of Iraq could give the United States de facto control over the Persian Gulf area and two-thirds of the world's oil – an unrivaled prize in the historic human struggle for power and wealth.

Perhaps these ulterior motives do justify war on Iraq, even if the three stated reasons do not. If that is the case, the President should make this claim to the American public, and let us determine whether we want such a war.

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